

Two ears really are better than one

The new Binaural Supra Headset is going to make life a lot more comfortable for anyone who spends a great deal of time on the telephone.

Like its single-ear predecessor with mouthpiece and earplug, the dual-ear Supra offers hands-free phoning, volume control and no echo-chamber effect. But unlike its predecessor, it channels sound into both ears via dual ear pads, replacing the sometimes uncomfortable, and always unbalanced, single earplug. The sound is not stereophonic; the wearer hears exactly the same in each ear.

For anyone who has juggled a receiver, shifted it from shoulder to shoulder or even dropped it in mid-conversation, any headset is an obvious improvement. But the Supra offers some advantages that place it far ahead of last year's single-earpiece model.

First, there is an important per-



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ceptual difference that comes from listening with both ears. You actually get the sensation that you're almost in the same room as the person you're talking with.

Second, it's much more comfortable. Often, with the older model, just one hour on the phone and I would be ready to rip off the headset for relief.

Third, because both ears are covered, the binaural headset does a better job of blocking out ambient noise. This, of course, makes it easier to concentrate on the phone conversation — an especially important consideration for people who work in noisy rooms.

This is not to say that the Supra is without drawbacks. For starters,

it's \$22 more than its single-ear counterpart. It's available for \$155 from Plantronics, of Santa Cruz, Calif., and you can plan on paying an extra \$50 to have it professionally installed on your phone.

Also, despite its high level of comfort, the Supra's dual ear pads do tend to warm up the wearer's ears. I didn't find this

particularly irritating, but some people might.

After using the Binaural Supra for a while, however, I did have one quibble. Because the set is comfortable enough to leave on all day, the people in my office were never able to tell whether I was on a call. I would suggest that this minor problem could be easily rectified by the manufacturer placing a small light on the headset to indicate that the wearer is on the line.

The bottom line: The Binaural Supra Headset is a wonderful business tool, and I highly recommend it for anyone who spends a lot of time on the phone.

Hillel Segal's previous Computer column now has been broadened to include evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.

